



During training at Grafenwoehr Training Area, a combat engineer from 54th Engineer Battalion conducts a manual breach of an enemy minefield using C-4 explosives and Modern Demolition Initiators (MDI)

Photo by Dennis Johnson, 130th Engineer Brigade

Story and Photos provided by Dennis Johnson

ENGINEERS

dig-in

*I*n preparation for deployment to Iraq, 54th Engineer Battalion (Combat Mechanized) made a lot of noise and sent a lot of dirt flying at the Expeditionary Training Center in Grafenwoehr, Germany throughout March.

As part of the required bi-annual Engineer Qualification Tables, the 54th Engineer Battalion's first two weeks of training focused on individual small arms and crew-served weapons qualifications, with the last week's focus being more on demolition skills at individual and squad levels.

The battalion moved from the comfort of buildings at Camp Aachen into tent camps near Range 213 for the last and most interesting part of the training.

To complete the EQTs each platoon must complete a defensive lane, a dry-fire lane, and an offensive live-fire lane where the real bangs and booms happen.

The battalion's HHC worked to make every lane as real as possible with "injects" added to the mission scenarios.

On March 21, during the defensive lane, 2nd platoon of Company C was required to set up a traffic check point.

While guarding the check point, a paper arrived for the platoon leader - in it was a written scenario about a Soldier firing into a car at the checkpoint. According to the script, two local men in the car were reaching under their seats and not responding to commands. A Soldier responded by firing a shot into the car at which time they sped away.

A few minutes after this written scenario was presented to the platoon leader, another car pulled up and a "journalist and cameraman" got out. Played by a GTA public affairs officer and a battalion soldier, they approached the platoon leader to get the story.

"Hi, I'm from the British Broadcasting Company, can you tell us about the shooting here?"

Second platoon's leader responded well, telling the facts as he knew them and relating the command message - how the Soldiers are here to protect the local area, each other, and that they

followed the procedures in place for security at this checkpoint.

This type of media training is just one aspect of the training scenarios developed by the battalion staff that took place at Grafenwoehr Training Area.

A group of COBs (acting as eight local townsmen) approached the checkpoint's wire barrier. Gesturing wildly and shouting incomprehensibly, they appeared agitated but not really dangerous. After some caveman-level communications - "cigarettes?" - "food?" - the platoon leader, 1st Lt. Dave Arroyo, determined they only wanted to pass through to the next village. But, if there were any spare cigarettes or food, they'd be happy to take those too. The local men passed on, but without any stashes of American cigarettes or MREs.

Staff Sgt. Mark Smedley stood guard while Arroyo dealt with the COBs.

Smedley has been in this situation before while deployed to Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq.

"We learn to first treat them with respect and dignity, and then try to accommodate their request, without drawing down our own supplies. Show them that we're not the enemy, that we're here to help," Smedley said. "In Bosnia and Iraq, if we could sense that the people around us weren't aggressive, we'd allow them to come closer. I've had crowds like that come to gates where I've been working. They were all friendly, mostly looking for work," he said.

About the training here, Smedley said **it's real and the COBs try their best to act like locals would.**

(Johnson is a public affairs specialist with the 130th Engineer Brigade Public Affairs Office, Hanau, Germany. Although overall content of story remains intact, the style of the original article was edited.)

ETC

ENGINEERS *dig-in*



A combat engineer from Company A, 54th Engineer Battalion, fires a M249 Squad Automatic Weapon at enemy troops in the open as the platoon prepares to conduct a Bangalore breach of an enemy wire obstacle.



“Grafenwoehr Training Area is the best facility to conduct the type of training we require to consider ourselves trained for combat.

—Maj. Timothy Holman, officer-in-charge, 54th Eng. Bn.

54th Engineer Battalion combat engineers conduct a manual breach of an enemy minefield using C-4 explosives and Modern Demolition Initiators.



Combat Engineers from 2nd platoon, Co. A, 54th Engineer Battalion, use their M113A3 to fire the Mine Clearing Line Charge and breach a lane through an enemy minefield to clear the way for follow-on forces.